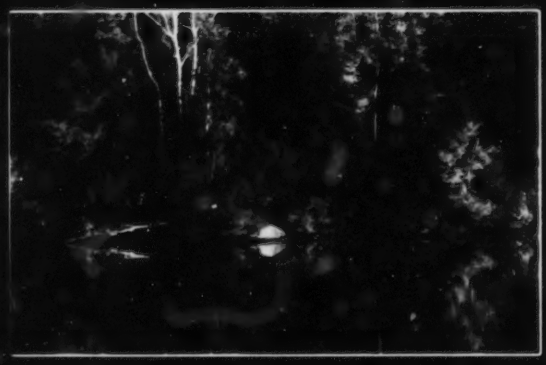

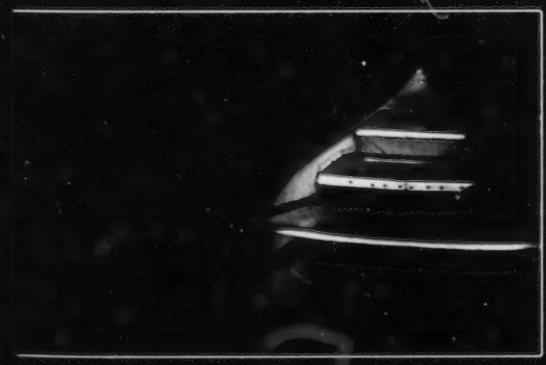

Ontario
Smart Growth

Shape the Future

Northwestern Ontario Smart Growth Panel

Final Report

May 2003

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Smart Growth
NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO

May 2, 2003

Honourable David Young
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Province of Ontario
777 Bay Street, 17th Floor
Toronto, ON, M5G 2E5

Dear Minister Young,

On behalf of the northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel, I would like to present you with this Final Report as a follow-up to our draft Letter of Advice sent last December to your predecessor, the Honourable Chris Hodgson.

As you know, our panel has been meeting monthly for almost a year now to discuss the many important growth-related issues and challenges that face northwestern Ontario. During the course of these discussions, we have received many interesting and informative presentations from a variety of individuals, organizations and ministries.

These discussions culminated in our draft Letter of Advice, in which we presented both general strategic advice regarding our zone, and several specific issues that we feel represent opportunities for immediate action.

Recently, we conducted focus group and public consultation sessions in Thunder Bay and Kenora. The purpose of these sessions was to present the ideas found in our draft Letter of Advice to community leaders and members of the general public in order to determine if we were on the right track.

Having attended both sessions, I am pleased to say that the response to our ideas was overwhelmingly positive, and we now feel validated as a panel that we have correctly identified the issues of greatest importance in our zone. During these sessions, we also gathered many constructive suggestions that we have incorporated into our Final Report. Beyond these specific comments, participants also liked the fact that our list of Action Items was co-ordinated, interrelated and concise.

Beyond this overall positive response, however, there were a couple of specific issues that were flagged by both panel members and focus group participants and that I think deserve to be brought to your immediate attention.

The first of these issues is the Ministry of Natural Resources' Room to Grow framework, which is a component of Ontario's Living Legacy land use strategy. Municipal leaders attending our sessions stress the need to work more closely with the municipal sector, as this framework will have profound implications for the zone's forest products industry and protected areas. Furthermore, the panel feels that the this process should learn from the transparent, multi-stakeholder, Smart Growth process.

A second issue that our panel would like to bring to your attention is the opportunity for Smart Growth to maintain its momentum over the coming years. The panel feels that a champion is required to push the Smart Growth agenda forward for northwestern Ontario. In fact the northwest needs many champions – in addition to the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines – to make sure that recommendations for achieving Smart Growth make their way successfully through the political decision-making process and into public policy.

In closing, I want to relay to you how much I, and my panel colleagues, have enjoyed being involved in this process. As a group, we feel strongly that Smart Growth has much to offer northwestern Ontario and that this Final Report marks an important milestone in realizing that potential.

The delivery of this Final Report marks an important step in developing a Smart Growth strategy for the zone. We look forward to the government's response to our strategic advice and specific recommendations for creating employment and youth opportunities.

Yours sincerely,

Glenn R. Witherspoon

Glenn Witherspoon, Mayor

Northwestern Ontario Smart Growth Panel, Chair

104-00380/

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Fort Frances Mayor Glenn Witherspoon (shown here with other panel members) is leading the northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel. From left to right: Harold Wilson, Don Bubar, Patricia Lang, Sandy Dickson, Glenn Witherspoon, Lorne Crawford, Sidney Wintle, Pat Richardson, Harvey Yesno and Michael McGuire.

Panel members:

Glenn Witherspoon, mayor, Town of Fort Frances (panel chair)

Ken Boshcoff, mayor, City of Thunder Bay

Don Bubar, president and chief executive officer, Avalon Ventures Ltd.

David Canfield, mayor, City of Kenora

Lorne Crawford, president, Northwestern Strategies Inc.

Sandy Dickson, provincial chair, Ontario Fish and Wildlife Advisory Board

Cliff Friesen, executive vice-president, Bearskin Airlines

Patricia Lang, president, Confederation College

Mary MacKenzie, clerk and director of corporate and planning services, Town of Sioux Lookout

Michael McGuire, president, Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association

Pat Richardson, mayor, Town of Marathon

Mike Shusterman, president, Land of the Nipigon Chamber of Commerce

Harold Wilson, executive director, Northwestern Ontario Development Network

Sidney Wintle, mayor, City of Dryden

Harvey Yesno, president and chief executive officer, Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund

Introduction

A strong sense of community and the incredible outdoors are just two of many reasons for wanting to live and raise a family in northwestern Ontario. In spite of its strengths, this region is not experiencing the kind of growth that it could and its population has declined steadily over the past few decades. The challenge is to build on northwestern Ontario's strengths to position it well economically for this new century.

The minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing recognized that northerners are the best people to respond to this challenge. So, in February 2002, he appointed the northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel – a group of leaders from industry, educational institutions, First Nations and Métis communities, the municipal sector and other community organizations – to develop recommendations for bringing growth and prosperity to northwestern Ontario. Appointing panels for each of the province's five zones was one of the government's first steps toward furthering Smart Growth.

After almost a year of meeting and building consensus, members of the northwestern panel have reached a significant point in their mandate. This final report identifies areas that the province and others can start acting on now.

Northwestern Ontario Smart Growth Panel mission statement

The panel created the following mission statement to guide it in its work:

The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel will provide advice on a long-term growth strategy. In communities across the zone, it will help decision-makers promote and foster growth — growth that creates economic opportunities, sustains communities, attracts new residents, gives young families the option of staying closer to home and protects and enhances the northern way of life and natural environment.

Everyone has an interest in Smart Growth

It is expected that more than 15 million people will live in Ontario in 2026. That's almost four million more than in 1999. The Ontario government wants all regions of the province to benefit from that growth. That means urban, rural and remote communities across Ontario.

Smart Growth is the government's vision for promoting and planning for growth in ways that create strong economies, build vibrant communities and promote clean, healthy environments.

The Smart Growth approach

Builds consensus:
At its core, Smart Growth is about building consensus and creating partnerships. That's because growth issues cross municipal boundaries and government jurisdictions: they encompass such areas as transportation, infrastructure and land use; and they affect stakeholders differently. To get everyone working toward the same goals requires building consensus among key stakeholders, integrating decision-making within and among governments and gaining broad public support.

Promotes and manages growth:
Smart Growth welcomes growth for its ability to generate new businesses, jobs and the revenue necessary to support the services we value. As much as it welcomes growth, this initiative recognizes that growth must be managed to protect the environment and ensure residents a high quality of life.

Looks at the big picture:
Smart Growth asks us to take a longer-term view in planning for growth. It calls for being more strategic about where public money is spent. In other words, Smart Growth is a plan for further improving quality of life across the province but for doing so strategically and in ways that are right for each zone.

For more information and examples of Smart Growth initiatives, visit **www.smartgrowth.gov.on.ca.**

Photo credit: Donald H. Davies and Diana Astrid Fernandes

Northwestern Ontario Smart Growth Zone

Overview of Northwestern Ontario and Major Sectors

The panel spent a good deal of time listening to industry and ministry presentations on a wide variety of topics of importance to our region.

The following is a brief summary of what we have heard.

The Land

One of the defining characteristics of the northwest is its vast size and the resulting distances that must be traveled between communities. Northwestern Ontario encompasses some 523,252 square kilometers – fully 57 per cent of the province's landmass.

Northwestern Ontario contains a wide diversity of geographies – ranging from tundra in the far North, to rugged sections of forested Canadian Shield across the midsection, to pockets and strips of fertile farmland in the more southern areas.

From the shores of Hudson Bay and James Bay in the north, to the thousands of small lakes across the entire region, to the shores of Lake Superior to the south and east, water is both a fact of life and an opportunity for northwestern Ontario.

The zone's natural heritage and natural resources are major and distinct assets that contribute to the area's high quality of life and promise much further potential for the region.

The recent Lands for Life initiative, in which several of the members of the northwestern Smart Growth panel were involved, took a comprehensive view of this region. The outcome of this process, Ontario's Living Legacy, has been the establishment of a strategy that focuses on the protection and sustainable management of natural resources. The people of the northwest now look forward to building on that process to identify and pursue opportunities for economic development and growth.

An excellent example of the efforts being made in this regard is the Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative. This initiative, which is a part of Ontario's Living Legacy, brings different levels of government, communities, Aboriginal Peoples, resource industries and interest groups together to ensure that the Great Lakes Heritage Coast will remain an outstanding, high quality natural resource and become one of the primary tourist destinations in the world.

The People

Any discussion of the population of northwestern Ontario must begin with the statement of a rather simple fact – there are not very many people in this region.

About 235,000 people live in northwestern Ontario, with the majority found in a few major centres. The Thunder Bay Census Metropolitan Area, for example, is home to about 52 per cent of the zone's entire population.

One of the most important characteristics of the population of northwestern Ontario is that it has been declining for several decades. Statistics Canada data suggest that its population has declined by about four per cent since 1996. This disturbing trend has many undesirable implications, and much of the panel's effort has been focused on addressing and reversing this decline.

Another characteristic of the northwestern population is that the average age is increasing faster than the provincial or national averages. This is caused mostly by increasing out-migration of youth and young families to southern Ontario, and a lack of in-migration of young people from elsewhere.

There is one very notable exception to these population trends. Northwestern Ontario is home to a large – and growing – number of children and young people from First Nations and Métis communities. Any discussion about the future of northwestern Ontario must recognize this, and focus on the opportunities and issues this reality will present.

There are approximately 40,000 aboriginal persons living in 48 First Nations communities throughout the northwest. About 40 per cent of these people live in and around Thunder Bay. The rest are spread throughout small communities, averaging less than 500 persons – another unique characteristic of the northwest that brings both challenges and opportunities.

There are exciting opportunities for partnerships with First Nations. When promoting Smart Growth, attention must be paid to the interests of aboriginal partners. Resource development on traditional land must benefit aboriginal communities, and First Nations are committed to exploring opportunities for employment, education and training, access to business opportunities and revenue sharing.

The Economy

Northwestern Ontario is home to a somewhat diversified economy – ranging from sophisticated wood products industries, to precious metal mines, to fibre-optic-based call centres, to remote tourist outfitters, to vibrant agricultural producers.

However, the northwest is still heavily reliant on primary resource industries, especially forestry. While reliance on the natural resource sectors is not itself a problem, it does inevitably bring with it the challenges of a boom-and-bust cycle that is entirely out of the control of those in this region. International commodities markets for minerals, for example, can be extremely volatile, presenting serious challenges for communities that are dependent on mining.

As a result, further diversification of the economy and the creation of more downstream value-added activity in resource industries is a primary objective of community and business leaders across northwestern Ontario.

It is also critically important to remind people in the northwest and across Ontario that natural resource industries are not sunset industries. Forestry and mining are not industries of the past, but are key industries and growth generators for today and the future.

Another common misperception is that resource industries are not "high-tech", and that they do not offer exciting career opportunities for young people. Quite the contrary, forestry and mining are two of the most technologically advanced industries found anywhere. There are many well-paid and challenging careers that will be increasingly available to young people in the near future as much of the current workforce nears retirement.

Smart Growth has a role to play in contributing to the development of overall competitive strategies for the north's most important sectors that would align the goals and objectives of the private sector and governmental and educational institutions.

The following is a brief overview of the four major resource industries in northwestern Ontario, namely forestry, tourism, mining and agriculture.

Forestry

Wise management of forested lands is critically important to achieving Smart Growth in northern Ontario, especially northwestern Ontario. The northwest's forests must be managed for a wide range of uses, including sustaining jobs and communities and ensuring the long-term health of ecosystems.

A key to promoting Smart Growth in the northwest will be the development of a comprehensive strategy for fostering competitiveness and innovation within the forestry industry.

The forestry industry is a major contributor to the economy of the northwest and many communities are highly dependent on it. The industry generates about 15,300 direct and 19,100 indirect jobs in northwestern Ontario, including over three-quarters of the zone's manufacturing jobs.

Exciting opportunities for increased innovation and competitiveness exist within the forest products industry, such as increasing value-added production, particularly since these products are not subject to the U.S. softwood lumber duties.

It is also important to continue working with forestry companies to identify opportunities for increased fibre yield from intensive forest management, improving the utilization of fibre, and ultimately, increasing the value added to this fibre before it leaves the region.

Addressing the complex, long-term issue of electricity supply in northwestern Ontario is also critical to the continued success of the forestry industry. Forestry and forest products companies are amongst the largest consumers of power in Ontario. As a consequence, they are dependent on the availability of reliable, affordable and stable supplies of electricity.

Courtesy of Thunder Bay Tourism

Within the forestry sector, Smart Growth can build on a number of important initiatives currently underway, including the work of the Northwestern Ontario Forestry Council, the Confederation College Forestry Centre, the faculty of forestry and the forest environment at Lakehead University, the Ministry of Natural Resource's work on a forest sector strategy, as well as a number of forestry-related initiatives at the municipal level.

Tourism

Tourism is a very important part of the northwestern economy, reaching virtually every community in the region. Throughout the North as a whole in 1999, some 11.7 million visitors accounted for $1.3 billion in expenditures.

As a result, strategies aimed at promoting and increasing tourism will make an important contribution towards promoting Smart Growth in the zone.

Investments in the northwest's transportation infrastructure play a critical role in promoting tourism by facilitating access to the zone's many attractions.

The presence of many First Nations – both remote and otherwise – provides an important opportunity for cultural tourism. While this market may be relatively small today, it is growing and potentially very lucrative.

It is worth noting that tourism in northwestern Ontario is quite different in many ways from tourism operations and opportunities in southern Ontario.

For example, the largest segment of the tourism industry in the northwest is resource-based. As a result, the management and development of Crown land is of critical importance to the northwestern tourism industry – especially regarding the issue of long-term tenure for remote tourist operations.

Another important difference concerns the primary markets for tourism. The primary markets for tourism in the northwest are found in the Midwest states and, to a lesser extent, Manitoba. In southern – and even northeastern – Ontario the primary markets are found in southern Ontario, Quebec and the eastern Great Lake states.

Mining

Mining is a critically important industry in Ontario. The majority of mining activity in the province takes place in the north. However, the south also benefits directly from this industry because of the importance of Toronto as an international centre of mining finance and the large number of mining companies that are headquartered there.

Mining exploration, development, and production, accounted for $6.171 billion of economic activity throughout Ontario in 2000, as well as about 18,000 direct and 75,000 indirect jobs. Surprisingly to many, all of this activity is conducted on a cumulative area of about 0.01 per cent of the provincial landmass – a clear indication of the relatively small environmental footprint of mines compared to their wealth-creation potential.

Photo credit: Graham Oxby

Mining is an innovative, well-paid, capital-intensive industry, requiring employees with extensive education and training and specialized skills. Of the $1.3 billion in income accrued to mining workers in the province in 1999, 85 per cent was earned in northern Ontario, and the average salary was almost $60,000 per year.

In the future, increased value-added processing and manufacturing related to mining in northern Ontario will create opportunities for additional employment and diversification in the sector. Industrial minerals and rare metals, for which the northwest has a unique endowment, present some special opportunities in this regard.

There are also many opportunities for job creation at the front end of the mining cycle – that is in prospecting and early and advanced exploration – especially in the more remote northern part of the zone where there has been little historical activity due to a lack of road access. Encouraging partnerships between First Nations and the mineral industry to maximize these opportunities is a major theme of Smart Growth.

Agriculture

Agriculture represents a significant renewable resource for northern Ontario and there is much potential in the areas of new production, value-added production, and investment in new technologies.

Agriculture is a $170-million-a-year industry in northern Ontario. It is made up of dairy and beef industries and 5 per cent of all the farms in Ontario. Approximately 6,200 people are employed in the northern agriculture and food processing industry.

Growth opportunities exist in value-added production of cold-weather crops (cauliflower and cabbage), several varieties suited for northern production (canola, soybeans and durum wheat) and consumer niche markets. Value-added production such as cheese or french fries is a key growth area. Dryer-elevator facilities and fertilizer blending plants in Thunder Bay are also examples of infrastructure that support value-added production. Another innovative example concerns the use of heated water produced by local industries to support year-round greenhouses.

Smart Growth Across Northern Ontario

Members of the northwestern panel applaud the government for creating separate Smart Growth panels for northeastern and northwestern Ontario. In addition to the many opportunities and challenges that the two regions share, there are also important differences.

One example that has already been noted concerns tourism marketing. Another important difference between the two zones is the relative importance of the two major resource industries. In northwestern Ontario, forestry is more prevalent. In northeastern Ontario, mining has a more widespread impact.

This is not to say that forestry is unimportant in the northeast, or that mining does not play an important role in northwestern communities. Both industries are important across both northeastern and northwestern Ontario.

To this end, it is important to note that the northwestern panel's recommendation to formally designate a "Cluster of Excellence for Forestry" would also benefit the northeast, and that a northeastern "Region of Excellence for Mining and Mining Products and Services" proposal would also benefit the northwest.

Why Smart Growth Is Important for Northwestern Ontario

The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel believes that Smart Growth presents a unique opportunity for the residents of the northwest to work together to create a better future for this region. Panel members care passionately about both what the region has to offer, and what opportunities exist for future generations. Growth is essential for sustaining and improving the quality of life that residents of the northwest know their region has to offer.

The challenges facing the northwest are familiar to the panel members, and are reasonably well understood. The panel also recognizes that growth must come from building on the strengths of the region through efforts in a number of areas, and by doing a number of things right rather than by looking for quick fixes.

Smart Growth must build upon a number of recent initiatives that have done much to respond to these challenges. We believe that its chances for success come mostly from the consultative and consensus-building process it provides for multiple stakeholders. One of the northwest's most important assets is the ability of its residents to work together towards common goals and coalesce around a shared vision for their communities. Recent examples of this include the successful initiatives to establish a new medical school and hospital in Thunder Bay.

To this end, the northwestern Smart Growth panel brings together leaders from several key sectors in the North, including municipalities, business, First Nation and Métis communities, forestry, tourism, mining, agriculture, post-secondary education and other community groups.

In addition to building upon earlier Smart Growth consultations, the panel has also heard directly from a number of key stakeholders addressing the challenges and opportunities for the region.

Working together presents the opportunity to balance environmental, economic and social goals, and build a consensus about how the northwest should move forward. The province has committed to create a strategy for growth based on the panel's advice, and to use this as the basis for provincial decisions about growth.

Provincial ministries have also begun the process of working together on growth challenges by establishing the northwestern Smart Growth zone committee to support the work of the panel. See Appendix 2 for more description of the inter-ministry support for the northwestern panel.

Northwestern Smart Growth Themes

While everyone can appreciate the benefit of having a long-term Smart Growth strategy for northwestern Ontario, the true value of that strategy must be measured by the real impacts it will have on the day-to-day lives of people in the region – today and into the future.

As such, it is important that the Smart Growth pillars – a strong economy, employment opportunities, vibrant communities and a clean and healthy environment – be connected to more specific issues. This will ensure that a Smart Growth strategy for northwestern Ontario will help the region to take advantage of opportunities that arise, and manage the challenges that will also inevitably come along.

In order to make this connection, the northwestern panel has developed a set of Smart Growth "themes" to help to organize and co-ordinate thinking and discussion of specific issues – so that this advice can address and promote several Smart Growth values and goals simultaneously.

The panel started with the overarching theme that **the northwest must build on its existing strengths**. Rather than lamenting what the region does not have, the panel feels strongly that leaders should focus on what the northwest currently has, and on what it does well, already.

The other major northwestern themes identified are:

- preparing for growth by looking ahead at the likely or potential impacts of future population trends;
- finding new ways to grow by developing partnerships, creating incentives for businesses, investing in resource-based industries, and linking educational centres to existing industries;
- developing a strong workforce by forging better links between colleges and universities, and by developing better co-operative training and apprenticeship programs;
- marketing the northwest so that potential investors, residents and visitors know about all the great things this region has to offer; and
- working together with the fast-growing First Nation and Métis communities to create opportunities for all the young people in this region.

An important principle identified by the panel is the need to improve the economic competitiveness of northwestern Ontario. In the northwest, as in other places, future prosperity will only be achieved through a commitment to continuously promoting innovation and enhanced productivity.

Another important issue concerns infrastructure investment and the efficient use of existing infrastructure. Panel members have identified strategic investments in infrastructure as an important component of preparing the zone for growth.

The panel believes that collectively, these themes can provide decision-makers with a useful lens through which they can view the specific issues and challenges confronting them, and better see the future opportunities that exist for northwestern Ontario.

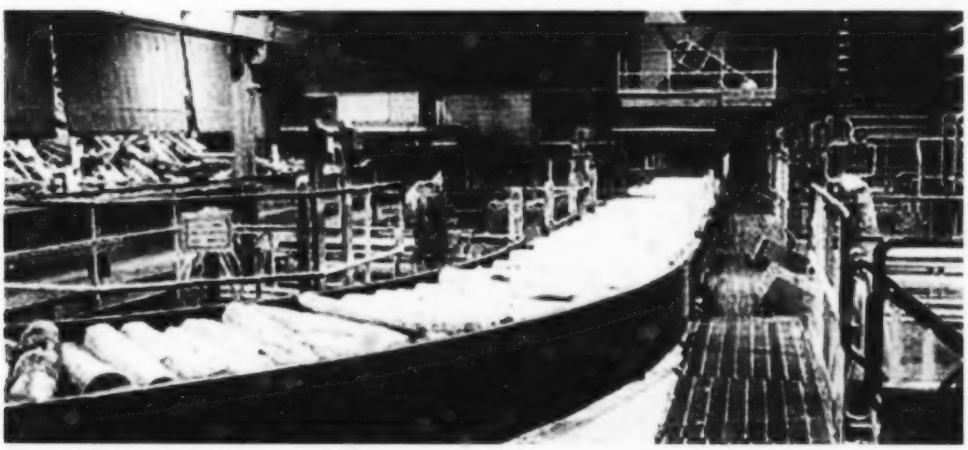


Photo credit: Wardrop Engineering Inc.

Action Items

In addition to the major themes discussed in the previous section, the panel identified several specific issues that warrant immediate attention, and several "Action Items" for the government's consideration. Details of these "Action Items", including background and advice to the government, follow.

Action Item 1

Cluster of Excellence for Forestry and Forest Products

Background

In northern Ontario, we should pursue the widest variety of opportunities to maximize the sustainable value of our natural resources. Examples of this include harvesting wood fibre, extracting mineral resources, developing cottage lots and commercial recreational operations on Crown land, bottling water, farming peat, capturing renewable energy and gathering wild rice. In northwestern Ontario, arguably the most important opportunities are connected to the forestry and forest products cluster.

Much of Ontario's approximately 170 million acres of forest falls within the northwestern and northeastern Smart Growth zones. The north's vast forests represent one of the region's major assets, and wise management of these lands is critical to achieving important economic, social and environmental objectives and to promoting the sustainable growth of northern communities.

Ontario's forests are managed for a wide range of uses, including sustaining jobs and communities and ensuring the long-term health of ecosystems. The provincial government must foster increased economic development from the land base. A key to promoting Smart Growth in the northwest will be the development of a comprehensive strategy for fostering competitiveness and innovation within forestry and related industries.

A competitive forestry and forest products industry is critical to the future of the northwest. As one of the major industries and one of the largest employers in this zone, forestry and forest products will continue to be a key economic driver for northwestern communities. The forestry industry generates more than 15,000 direct and 19,000 indirect jobs in northwestern Ontario. The zone's sawmills, pulp and paper mills, panel board plants and related woodlands, harvesting, reforestation, tending, and transportation operations provide the economic foundation for many communities.

Forestry and forest products is a dynamic sector, and there are exciting opportunities and great potential for increased innovation and competitiveness, including increased value-added production. According to a study commissioned by the Living Legacy Trust, Ontario's solid wood value-added sector accounts for three times as many jobs as the wood commodity sector.

The northwest is already home to many elements of a vibrant forestry and forest products cluster. A number of groups are committed to building on the region's existing strengths in forestry and forest products and to increasing the competitiveness of this cluster in order to generate jobs and prosperity.

As forestry and forest companies are amongst the largest consumers of power in Ontario, the competitiveness of this industry is closely tied to energy costs and the availability of reliable and stable supplies of energy. Indeed, price volatility has the potential to result in plant closures.

Electricity is a complex, long-term issue, which requires careful planning for the future to address the unique characteristics of the northwest. The zone is isolated from major population centres in southern Ontario, and experiences significantly different climatic conditions that result in unique patterns of power usage. Transmission of power is also particularly expensive owing to the large geographical area.

One possible means of addressing the northwest's unique electricity needs would be to introduce locational marginal pricing, or region specific pricing. Northwestern Ontario may be suited to having a separate electricity price determined by conditions of supply and demand within this zone.

Because the landbase for growing wood fibre in northern Ontario is finite, it is important to work with commodity-based forestry companies to identify opportunities for increased fibre yield from intensive forest management, to improve utilization of fibre, and to increase the amount of value that is added to this fibre before it leaves the region.

Important linkages exist between the forestry and forest products cluster and other clusters in the province. For example, biotechnology plays a key role in the development of non-timber forest products, such as food products, health and personal-care products, environmental energy products, decorative and aesthetic products, landscape and garden products.

Relevance to Smart Growth

The northwestern panel has identified the importance of aggressively building on the zone's existing strengths in order to generate new wealth and opportunities. Smart Growth will come about as a result of continuous improvements in the productivity, competitiveness and innovative capacity of the zone's key economic sectors, such as forestry.

Geographic proximity of forest activities is one of the northwest's primary strengths. Designating the northwest as a cluster of excellence for forestry and forest products would build on the work of the Ontario task force on competitiveness, productivity and economic progress, which has already identified forest products as an existing cluster in the northwest.

The development of a cluster of excellence for forestry and forest products in northwestern Ontario presents exciting opportunities for collaboration among all levels of government, universities, colleges, industry, and other

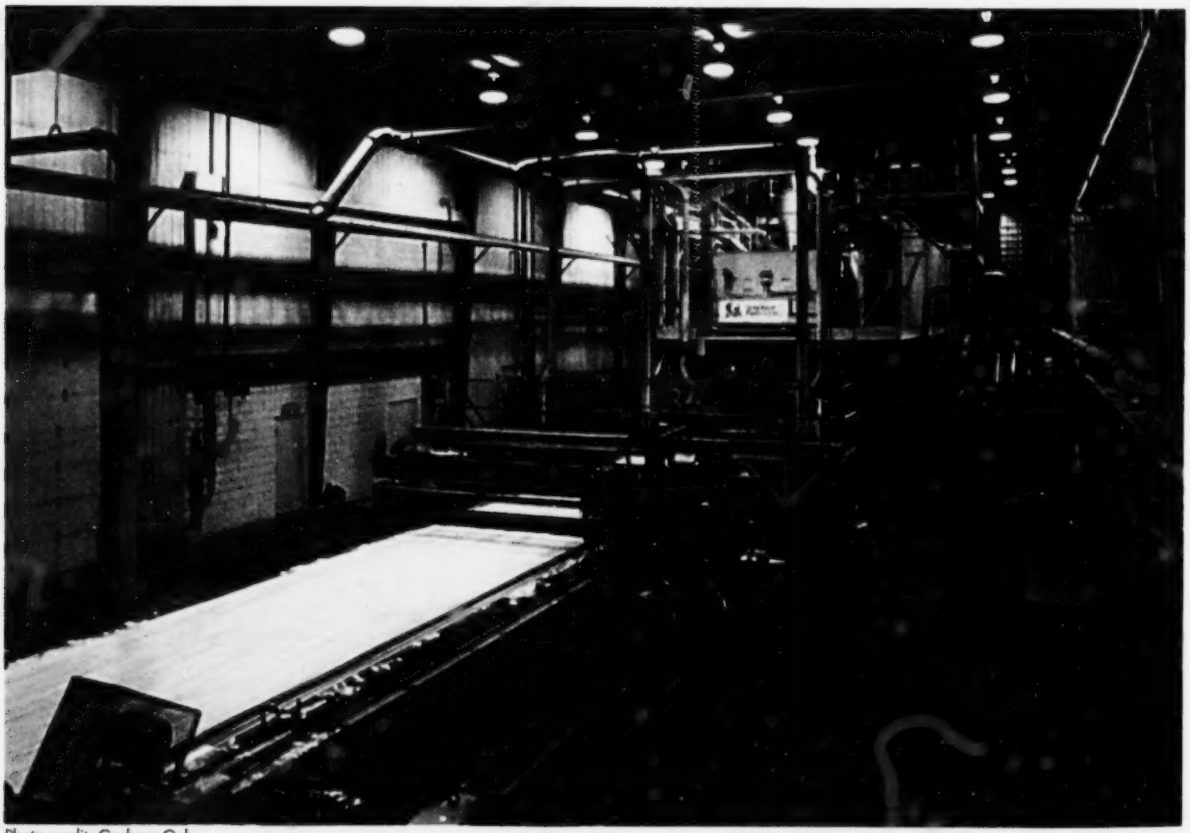


Photo credit: Graham Oxby

actors involved in the forestry and forest products sectors. By aligning their goals and objectives, the private sector and government can increase competitiveness, increase value-added activity, and contribute to the sustainable development of the forestry and forest-products industry as well as that of northern communities.

As a result of technological advances, people and businesses are increasingly able to interact with one another on a global scale. However, even in today's increasingly globalized environment, many of the most exciting economic advances take place where clusters, or concentrations, of related businesses and institutions allow people to "rub shoulders", working in close proximity to each other. That is why so many innovative ideas come out of clusters, such as Silicon Valley.

Clusters of economic activity provide firms with the opportunity to take advantage of common resources, such as a specialized work force, research centres, and specialized suppliers. Clusters allow businesses to compete and collaborate in ways that leave everyone better off and that spur more rapid economic growth for the region as a whole. There are numerous examples around the world that show implementing a cluster strategy has accelerated economic growth, providing good jobs and a higher standard of living for people.

Designating the northwest as a cluster of excellence for forestry and forest products would build upon a number of important initiatives currently underway at various levels of government as well as the private sector and educational institutions.

These initiatives include the work of the Northwestern Ontario Forestry Council, the work being done by the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM) on Ontario's forestry cluster, the Ministry of Natural Resource's (MNR) work on a Forest Sector Strategy, the Northern Boreal Initiative, the value-added initiative associated with Ontario's Living Legacy, the Forestry Research Partnership, the Confederation College Forestry Centre, the work of the faculty of forestry and the forest environment at Lakehead University, the work of the Ontario Forest Industries Association and the Ontario Lumberman's Association, as well as a number of forestry-related initiatives at the municipal level.

Advice to Government

1.1 The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel believes that the provincial government has an important role to play in strengthening and promoting the forestry and forest products cluster, and strongly supports the work being done by MNDM on clusters and innovation in Ontario's forestry cluster.

1.2 The panel strongly recommends that a clear lead be established within government for developing a forestry and forest products cluster strategy. As the regional ministry acting as the policy voice for the North and responsible for promoting northern economic and community development and co-ordinating the delivery of programs and services in the North, MNDM would be the clear lead for this initiative.

MNDM's commitment to promoting a healthy, competitive and sustainable northern economy that combines the strengths of its resource industries with the emerging opportunities of a knowledge-based economy makes it the most effective advocate for forestry and related industries and lead for a cluster strategy. While MNR has an important role to play in resource stewardship and safeguarding the natural environment, it may not be positioned to be as effective an advocate for forestry and related industries.

1.3 The panel encourages MNDM to work closely with MNR and other affected ministries such as the Ministry of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation (MEOI), on a forestry and forest products clusters strategy. It is important that MNR's forest sector strategy complement this cluster strategy.

1.4 The panel recommends that the Ontario government formally designate and develop northwestern Ontario as a cluster of excellence for forestry and forest products within the broader Ontario context.

Northwestern Ontario has an important role to play in an Ontario forestry and forest products cluster strategy as the province's forestry and related industries are concentrated in this zone. Such a designation would provide the region with a positive identity, create a better climate for innovation, stimulate the engine of economic growth, encourage more value-added activity and lead to increased jobs.

The purpose of this formal designation is to recognize the strategic importance of forestry and forest products in the new economy and focus the activity of all sectors involved in the forestry and forest products industry in northwestern Ontario – including government, industry, labour, related businesses and others – on a shared goal that will benefit everyone associated with the industry. This action should lead to many strategically co-ordinated actions, such as:

- **Better co-ordination of programs across all three levels of government;**
- **Adoption of Grow Bonds in the northwest;**
- **Strategic use of tax incentives;**
- **Increased research and development funding;**
- **Better funding of apprenticeship and training programs;**
- **Establishment of a college and university forestry research program and chair;**
- **Focusing on existing forestry and forest products operations to enhance value-added activities;**
- **Priority status for needed transportation and other infrastructure projects;**
- **Marketing the designation of the northwest as a cluster of excellence and the importance of forestry and forest products to Ontario's economy; and**
- **Benchmarking Ontario's forestry and forest products cluster with other jurisdictions.**

This formal designation will be important to northwestern Ontario because it will signify a long-term government commitment to maximizing the value of the forestry and forest products industry to the regional and provincial economies.

1.5 New partnerships between the public and private sectors are also encouraged, and should improve chances for strategic investments in important infrastructure projects, such as roads and power transmission lines.

1.6 On the energy issue, the panel supports the accelerated study of the possible merits of implementing locational marginal pricing in the zone.

Beneficiaries

Investing in the forestry and forest products sector and creating a better climate for innovation will attract skilled people to the zone, generate opportunities for local residents, and create more jobs. It would help attract and retain youth and young families in the zone and enable residents to utilize their education and training in their home communities. It presents exciting opportunities for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal residents of the northwest.

The benefits of designating northwestern Ontario as a cluster of excellence for forestry and forest products would be significant and felt in every community in northwestern Ontario.

Without a cluster strategy, Ontario's forestry and related industries may not realize their full potential in the global context. As a result, northern communities would continue to experience the challenges of developing and retaining a skilled workforce in the face of out-migration, an ageing population, high unemployment and a sparsely populated vast geography.

Cost Implications

The initial cost of formally designating northern Ontario as a cluster of excellence for forestry and forest products would be minimal in the short term. The longer-term costs (and benefits) for the development and implementation of a cluster strategy will be determined by the specific actions taken.

Measures such as establishing a university research chair and undertaking the necessary research on value-added opportunities and markets will require significant investments.

Action Item 2

Attraction and Retention of Youth & Young Families

Background

Northwestern Ontario communities need young people to survive, grow and prosper. It is important to attract and retain youth and young families by providing them with the education and job opportunities they need.

Many communities in the zone have seen a drop in their youth populations as residents age and young people leave to seek employment and education elsewhere. It is important to understand the causes of this drop in youth population in non-First Nation communities so that the causes can be addressed and this trend reversed.

A key to retaining youth is to create opportunities for them to acquire skills and expand their range of experience so that they can build careers in their home communities. High school guidance counselling plays a key role and needs to be improved to better help identify these opportunities, including those in the skilled trades. There are many exciting opportunities for challenging careers in the skilled trades, but they are often misunderstood. It is critical also to provide opportunities for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal youth both within and outside of First Nations communities. Universities and colleges play an important role in creating opportunities. For example, Confederation College offers a Mechanical Engineering Technology program that was designed in consultation with the forestry sector. Apprenticeship programs help businesses retain youth by turning out highly trained employees.

Looking ahead to the next 10-15 years, skilled and technologically competent workforces in the mining and forestry sectors will be needed – a need that will become more critical over this time period as current workers retire in significant numbers.

When it comes to attracting and retaining youth and young families, it is important potential newcomers are aware of the many quality-of-life benefits found in northwestern communities. Examples are convenient and inexpensive access to outdoor recreational activities, competitive housing costs, and lifestyle options that may not be affordable elsewhere – such as having one stay-at-home parent.

The panel recognizes, at the outset, that not everyone will be attracted to the northern lifestyle. We believe, however, that significant numbers of young people in northwestern Ontario and elsewhere would find the northern lifestyle attractive if they were more aware of it. This would also attract back to their communities those who have previously left the north (for example, to seek higher education).

Relevance to Smart Growth

The Smart Growth panel was asked to look specifically at ways of creating new youth and employment opportunities.

The future impacts of these changing population trends on economic growth, and employment and infrastructure needs are important considerations for Smart Growth.

Job creation will be key to keeping and attracting youth and young families to northwestern Ontario. Opportunities also exist with small businesses. For example, developing a "succession planning" strategy and database would help link young families and businesses (see the "Expansion of existing and new businesses" Action Item).

Advice to Government

2.1 The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel recommends the establishment of a multi-stakeholder process involving the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, the Ministry of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation (MEOI) and other stakeholders to develop a strategy to retain and attract youth and young families to northwestern Ontario. This would include developing opportunities for post-secondary students who are not from northern Ontario.

2.2 The strategy to attract and retain youth and young families should include a marketing program to promote what the northwest has to offer. It should also address the important role that industry and businesses can play in enhancing their operations and creating value-added manufacturing leading to job creation and training opportunities.

2.3 The panel further recommends that the province sponsor a forum involving industry, unions and post-secondary representatives in a round-table discussion to forge stronger linkages and help remove barriers to collaboration among key stakeholders. This round-table would look at opportunities that could be offered by industries and those that support their needs. The opportunities would include apprenticeship and co-op programs and programs matched to the specialized needs of industry. The role of MTCU and industry representatives in supporting the apprenticeship program would be a key consideration.

2.4 The panel further recommends that the province work with the federal government on:

- **Piloting a new approach to attracting immigrants to northern communities.**
- **Tax-incentive zones for companies ready to employ people.**
- **Enhanced funding for education and training institutions to enable them to increase trades and technical/skills training.**
- **Implementing the strategic options contained in the *Rural Youth Discussion Paper*. The strategic options are relevant to Smart Growth and deal with the following areas:**
  - **Enhancing employment opportunities, e.g., have education and training institutions provide greater access to technical/skills training; have local employers provide youth employment (panel comment – real challenge is that employers and educational systems need a catalyst).**
  - **Facilitating access to education and training, e.g., promote distance education and make high-speed Internet available (panel comment – high school students leave their communities because they can not get the courses they need – need to start here).**
  - **Civic engagement, e.g., encourage local governments to identify youth initiatives as a priority in community plans and strategies; encourage local governments to work together to develop strategies to engage rural youth.**
  - **Work orientation/rural "exposure" programs, e.g., have school districts and local employers work together to provide experience opportunities for youth in local industry; promote advantages of rural (northern) living.**

Beneficiaries

A strategy to mitigate the population outflow would benefit all communities in northwestern Ontario. By raising awareness of what northwestern Ontario has to offer and fostering opportunities to work together, youth would benefit from staying in their communities, and others, including young families, could benefit from the northern lifestyle.

Cost Implications

Initial costs would be limited to the cost of conducting a consultation process, and the cost of developing and conducting a marketing campaign.

There would also be costs associated with a provincially sponsored multi-stakeholder forum, tax-incentives and increased funding for education and training institutions.

Subsequent costs would be determined as the province develops new policy or programs.

Action Item 3

Crown Land Development

Background

Almost 87 per cent of the land base in Ontario is Crown land. In southern Ontario only a small percentage of the land base is still held by the Crown, while in northwestern Ontario the vast majority of land remains in the hands of the Crown.

Crown land is still disposed of in Ontario and it remains a policy of the Ministry of Natural Resources to make Crown land available for cottages/camps to either municipalities or, where private land is in short supply, the private sector. In practice however, little Crown land is being released except for existing approved "shelf" lots, some industrial land and municipal proposals.

Crown land with development potential falls into three different categories: land within municipalities, land adjacent to municipalities in unorganized areas and remote sites in unorganized areas suitable for commercial recreational development.

A useful recent example is in the City of Elliot Lake where approximately 400 recreational lots will be created on 20 lakes within the municipality. Private legislation was required to allow the city to establish a commission and use the proceeds of the lot sales for economic development purposes. Many lessons on expediting the disposition process can be learned from this case.

Other useful information is contained in the Crown Land Acquisition Study, which was commissioned by the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA). This study provides a description of the process used by the Ministry of Natural Resources in disposing of Crown land.

Many people in northwestern Ontario have strong views on this subject, and would like to see more land available for the purposes of economic development – especially on desirable waterfront land that could be used for recreational lots, but also for commercial, industrial, commercial recreational and agricultural. Developing Crown land also provides opportunities for partnerships with First Nations communities, but security of tenure is key to securing financing for development.

Relevance to Smart Growth

The issue of using Crown land as an economic development tool clearly touches on the three pillars of Smart Growth – building a strong economy; building vibrant communities; and protecting the environment.

One ingredient for growth is availability of land. In southern Ontario, much privately owned land is available for development. In northwestern Ontario, however, the vast majority of land remains in the hands of the Crown.

The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel sees the procedural difficulties that currently exist in the disposition process as a significant barrier to economic development in many northwestern communities. The panel also sees these difficulties as a significant limitation on their ability to use the "quality of life" benefit that cottages, camps and waterfront homes offer to attract and retain people in the North. Further, the panel is convinced that development of Crown land can be done properly so that it does not have a negative impact on the quality of the natural environment.

Advice to Government

3.1 The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel recommends that the province visibly revitalize the process to use Crown land as an economic development tool. To arrive at a revitalized Crown land disposition process, the panel recommends that a variety of stakeholders be consulted and that a multi-ministry group be established to make recommendations for improvements to Ontario's Crown land disposition process.

3.2 The panel recommends that the Ministry of Natural Resources develop a pre-screening process by which it would identify broad areas that have the potential for Crown land cottage and camp development. This would mean developers of Crown lands would be required to do only final studies to identify more precisely where development could take place.

3.3 The panel also recommends that the criteria used to evaluate applications for disposing of Crown land include recognition that economic development is a value that should be taken into consideration when selecting Crown land for disposition.

3.4 The panel recognizes there is Crown land within and outside municipal boundaries. Initially the panel recommends that the disposition of Crown land be focused within existing municipal boundaries. Those sites have access to municipal services and can benefit from municipal land-use controls such as zoning.

3.5 Finally, the panel recommends that the Ministry of Natural Resources look at the feasibility of releasing more Crown land in remote locations for commercial recreational development as well as releasing land for industrial, commercial or agricultural purposes where it is appropriate and there is a demand. This should include consideration for more security of tenure for existing commercial operations that currently use leased Crown land although the panel recognizes that the ability to pay is an issue. The Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative may provide an excellent opportunity for the Ministry of Natural Resources to pursue opportunities for the disposition of Crown land for commercial recreational development such as eco-lodges.

The panel believes these changes would help to revitalize the disposition process.

Beneficiaries

This initiative would greatly benefit communities across northwestern Ontario by spurring the construction of waterfront cottages/camps and homes and encouraging economic growth. Such growth would be enhanced in situations where the developer is required to extend roads and other infrastructure to service these cottages.

While most northwestern municipalities do not currently levy development charges, they could levy these charges on new waterfront lots and direct the revenue towards the financing of needed improvements to existing water and sewage systems, and for expanding road and hydro networks into new areas.

The sale of Crown land will generate net revenue for the provincial government, and in addition to the direct proceeds from the sale, the province may also benefit from the expansion and improvement of infrastructure that such development will require.

Cost Implications

There is risk of adverse environmental consequences to disposing of Crown land, depending on the amount and location of Crown land used for development purposes. Where such adverse consequences are deemed unacceptable and cannot be mitigated, developers and the Ministry of Natural Resources should co-operate to identify alternate locations.

By working with the Natural Resources and Environment ministries during the development of a revitalized Crown land disposition process, steps could be taken to ensure the protection of priorities and values – such as water quality, fisheries and other wildlife.

Resources would be required to cover the cost of a pre-screening process for identifying broad areas for potential Crown land disposition.

Action Item 4

Expansion of Existing and New Businesses

Background

Northwestern Ontario has clear strengths to build upon, including its people, its rich natural resource endowment for forestry, mining and tourism, its access to markets in the U.S., and its inhabitants' traditions of working together. However, there are barriers that have kept the North from realizing its potential, and the jobs and growth that come with it. A key to the success of Smart Growth in northwestern Ontario will be helping new businesses to become viable and existing businesses to grow by removing these barriers.

The barriers include limited access to capital, lack of supports for small business owners from start-up to succession planning, uncertainty in natural resource development created by a lack of progress on land claims, procurement practices by large resource companies that make it difficult for local firms to compete, and the lack of availability of reasonably-priced electricity due to vast distances.

The availability of reliable, affordable and stable supplies of energy is critical both to ensuring the viability of existing businesses and to attracting new businesses to the zone.

Access to capital is an issue for businesses of all sizes and stages of development. For example, operators of remote tourist camps have difficulty accessing development capital due to uncertainty of tenure created by current policies concerning leasing land for such operations. The panel is concerned that venture capital alternatives, such as government supported, labour-sponsored funds do not result in local sources of investment capital in the North.

Furthermore, decisions are too often made far away by large financial institutions that do not understand the local situation. They often question the viability of the community, not just the business in question. As a result, businesses in northwestern Ontario are particularly challenged.

Helping companies to grow is one of the best ways to create employment as it takes less effort to retain companies that are already established than to attract new ones. Access to capital is only one of the barriers for those starting or expanding a business. More needs to be done to help small businesses find ways around those barriers, such as writing a successful business plan, or with planning for succession so that retirement may not mean closing a business, but instead a new opportunity for someone else. These succession opportunities may offer an ideal circumstance for retaining youth or attracting young families to the north.

Larger businesses such as mining companies that operate in a global market are finding it increasingly difficult to secure funding for high-risk mining ventures in Ontario due to the uncertainty in mineral tenure created by aboriginal land claims. First Nations are important potential partners in mineral exploration and development in the zone and partnerships must be encouraged and facilitated by government through increased access to capital (a separate Action Item addresses this important issue).

Northwestern Ontario has some of the best opportunities in the world for discovery of valuable new mineral resources, but this potential cannot be realized without access to venture capital to finance early stage exploration work.

Finally, many communities and existing businesses in northwestern Ontario have benefited over the years from local and regional procurement of goods, services and labour by companies harvesting natural resources. In recent years, however, many of these northwestern companies have reported a decline in business as more and more purchasing decisions are made in company head offices rather than at the local operation, making it hard for local companies to have the chance to compete, thrive and survive.

Relevance to Smart Growth

Two key objectives of Smart Growth are the promotion of economic growth in areas of slow (or negative) growth and the better use of existing infrastructure and resources.

In order to create sustainable employment opportunities, many efforts have been made to attract companies currently located elsewhere to relocate some of their facilities to northwestern Ontario. Similar efforts have been made to help entrepreneurs open new businesses in northwestern Ontario. The best engines of job creation are the businesses that are already established. Existing businesses create the majority of new jobs in a community.

It is also very important to find ways of building on the zone's existing strengths and supporting existing businesses, to achieve Smart Growth. It is important to better understand the needs of existing businesses and to examine opportunities for local and regional procurement of goods and services by companies harvesting natural resources. It is also important to support growth within existing sectors to help new companies to start, and new resource producers to locate here.

Advice to Government

4.1 Removing barriers to growth is the key to supporting and encouraging the expansion of existing and new businesses. Emphasis should be placed on the removal of administrative burdens that impede business development.

4.2 The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel strongly recommends establishing a regionally focused Grow Bonds North program that would provide local investors and former residents with the opportunity to invest in a revolving capital pool for businesses in northwestern Ontario. The province would play a key role by guaranteeing the principle, perhaps through such programs as the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation.

4.3 The panel also recommends that the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM) launch a multi-stakeholder effort as soon as possible to develop a strategy to support and encourage the expansion of existing industries in northwestern Ontario, in particular in areas where the northwest has inherent strengths to build upon.

4.4 The panel also recommends that the Ontario government should investigate additional opportunities to improve access to capital for small and medium-sized businesses.

4.5 The panel also recommends that MNDM work with municipalities, economic development agencies, and business organizations (e.g., chambers of commerce) to develop community-based supports for small and medium-sized businesses, including support for developing business plans, and a "succession planning" strategy and database for small businesses and trades people in the north. Succession planning would keep some businesses open when an owner moves on and would provide new opportunities for youth.

4.6 The panel further recommends that government develop policies that will encourage natural resource companies to procure more goods and services (including labour) from regional or local suppliers, and develop more partnerships with aboriginal businesses.

4.7 In forestry, encouraging more local procurement could be pursued through tax incentives or by including regional and local economic impacts in the social-economic impacts already included in the class EA for sustainable forestry licenses, or as part of the business plan approval process to obtain a sustainable forestry license.

4.8 In mining, tax incentives could be put in place to encourage mining companies to procure goods regionally or locally and to hire more local workers. But for this industry to grow and create new employment opportunities, the government must focus on removing the barriers to attracting new investment to locate and develop the mines of tomorrow.

Courtesy of Thunder Bay Tourism

Beneficiaries

This would benefit communities and many small businesses in northern Ontario – both in the local community and at the regional level.

Cost Implications

There are some potentially direct expenses associated with the proposed approach, including those associated with guaranteeing the capital invested in the Grow Bonds program.

As well, there may be similar costs if forestry and mining companies are encouraged to purchase more goods and services in northwestern Ontario through tax incentives. However, the panel is confident that these costs can be offset by new tax revenues generated as a result of the increased economic activities created by these incentives.

Development of additional supports for small business may involve an expansion of services provided by MNDM at some incremental cost.

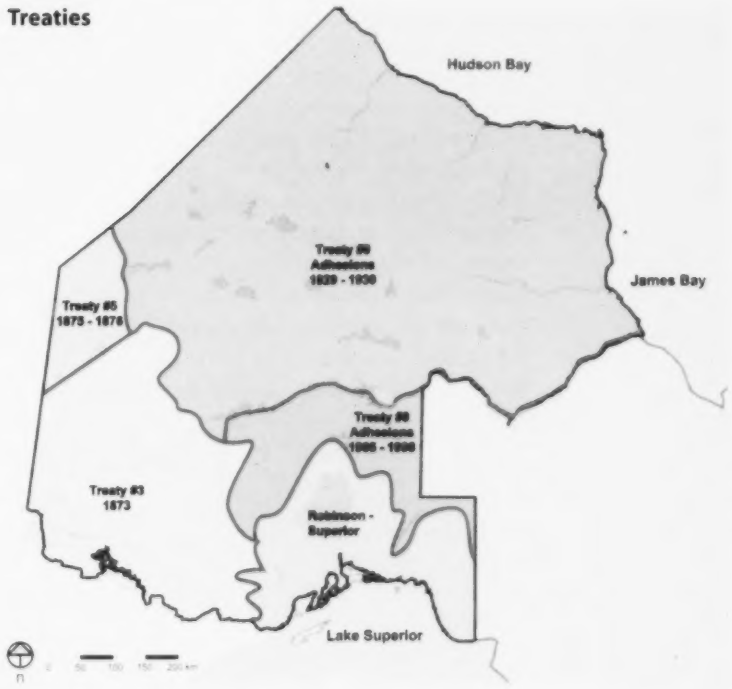
Action Item 5

Natural Resource Development in First Nations Traditional Land Use Areas

Background

There are a growing number of unresolved issues related to how natural resources on First Nations' traditional lands can be developed. Crown land in northern Ontario is often subject to aboriginal or treaty rights, which are recognized and affirmed in the Constitution Act, 1982. The Crown has a duty to consult aboriginal peoples where its action will infringe on aboriginal or treaty rights.

First Nations are increasingly asserting these rights to resist natural resource development when it is perceived to be in conflict with traditional land use activities and are insisting that new development projects must provide



a direct benefit to their communities through increased employment and business opportunities and sharing of revenues. These rights may conflict with rights granted under provincial legislation such as the Mining Act, and the resulting uncertainty in mineral tenure, for example, is discouraging new investment in mineral development in the province.

The panel believes that the duty to consult with First Nations is often left to local communities and business interests, who like the First Nations themselves, often lack the capacity to engage in the lengthy consultation/negotiation process that is usually required to resolve all the issues. Both First Nations and industry are now looking to the province to take an active role in the consultation process in order to clarify all parties rights and responsibilities with respect to resource development on Crown land.

Clarity in the process will help reduce the potential for conflicts that delay development projects. It should also help encourage new partnerships between industry and First Nations which would, in turn, result in an increase in economic development activity in the zone.

Northwestern Ontario has 48 First Nation communities, half of which are in remote locations, and 53 per cent of the total aboriginal population of 40,000 in the Northwest is under 25 years of age. Engaging aboriginal communities as partners in development is critical to the future of the region. In many cases, First Nations are willing to participate but lack the capital and experience to initiate the process. Government must help to bridge this gap.

There are many recent examples of successful partnerships that have resulted from consultation and working together, with significant benefits for both aboriginal communities and business. There have been partnerships in the energy sector, particularly in the development of transmission infrastructure. There have been partnerships in the energy sector, particularly in the development of transmission infrastructure and much potential exists for new small-scale, low impact, hydro developments (run of the river) in the North.

Open dialogue is a proven model for successful partnerships, with recent examples in the zone including the Ear Falls Weyerhaeuser sawmill, the Kenora Trusjoist mill, the Bowater-Fort William First Nation mill, and Placer Dome's Musselwhite gold mine. To build on these successes the government must find ways to facilitate similar partnerships involving small business that, like the First Nations, may lack the resources necessary to initiate and complete the process.

Relevance to Smart Growth

One of the main objectives of Smart Growth is the promotion of economic growth in areas of slow (or negative) growth. In much of the northern part of the zone, natural resource developments, specifically the mining, forestry, tourism and energy sectors are the only viable economic activity capable of significant wealth creation. Therefore, promotion of natural resource development is fundamental to achieving economic growth in the zone.

A second major objective of Smart Growth is to sustain communities by creating economic opportunities that will stem the outflow of youth from the zone. In most of the northern part of the zone, the only community infrastructure is represented by aboriginal communities typically containing a high proportion of young people.

It is consistent with both of these Smart Growth objectives to find ways to make the aboriginal communities catalysts for, rather than roadblocks to, natural resource development in the zone.

Advice to Government

5.1 The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel strongly recommends that the province actively consult with aboriginal communities about natural resource development in their traditional land use areas.

5.2 The panel recommends that an equitable revenue sharing formula be negotiated between the province and First Nations in order to address a key concern of First Nations and ensure that natural resource development in the zone can proceed without potential conflicts with industry.

Certainty of land tenure, achievable only through new revenue sharing arrangements and through meaningful participation and understanding of the First Nations, is an essential prerequisite to attracting the venture capital required to finance new developments.

5.3 In addition, the panel recommends that the province study ways to promote more partnerships such as joint ventures between First Nations and the resource industries. This can be achieved by facilitating access to venture capital for aboriginal-owned resource development companies to participate in joint ventures or provide services to industry.

The panel also recognizes that resolution of First Nations issues in the zone will require the support and involvement of the federal government. The fact that the current federal minister of Indian Affairs, Robert Nault, has personal knowledge of the zone may present a unique opportunity to initiate federal-provincial dialogue on First Nations issues specific to northern Ontario.

Beneficiaries

Resolution of this issue would benefit communities and many businesses, both large and small, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, throughout northern Ontario by removing a significant barrier to development of the region's natural resource wealth.

By creating more certainty in the process, the province would reduce perceived business risks and help restore its international reputation as a favoured jurisdiction for investment in natural resource development.

Cost Implications

Near-term costs would be limited to supporting a team of experts to research the issue and engage in consultation and negotiations with First Nations and industry.

Action Item 6

Expansion of the All-Weather Road Network

Background

Many First Nation communities in northwestern Ontario are not accessible by road. They rely on air service, winter roads and trails, and summer-only sea access along the Hudson Bay and James Bay coasts. Expansion of the all-weather road network is of great interest to the northern bands as well as the federal government, since the federal government has the primary responsibility for regularly shipping materials to many remote First Nation communities.

There is significant economic development potential in the northern part of the zone that can only be realized through improved transportation links. In addition, all-weather roads can be used as utility corridors to bring hydro, for example, to First Nations communities.

There are significant known timber reserves beyond both the current all-weather roads and the Ministry of Natural Resources' class environmental assessment. The geology also suggests the likely existence of major mineral resources in the far North. There are also cultural tourism opportunities for interested First Nations that want to have drive-in access.

Relevance to Smart Growth

The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel believes that access to reliable, safe and affordable transportation links is essential to create opportunities for economic and community development, and for establishing and maintaining a high quality of life.

Advice to Government

6.1 The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel recommends that the Ontario government should – together with the federal government and the First

Nations – make it a priority to develop a long-term strategy to expand the all-weather road network in northwestern Ontario. This would not be an extension of the provincial highway network, but would require a new kind of cost-sharing and maintenance arrangement between the province and the federal government.

Beneficiaries

It is widely understood that having viable transportation links are a necessary pre-condition to creating economic opportunity.

A strategy to expand the all-weather road network in northwestern Ontario would benefit many – especially the federal government, many First Nations, and companies and individuals involved in resource development.

Cost Implications

The cost of expanding the all-weather road network would be significant for the provincial and federal government. This would be partially offset by savings to the federal government for shipping goods by air, and by increasing tax revenue generated by additional resource development and extraction activities.

Action Item 7

Trans-Canada & Other Major Highways

Background

The Trans-Canada and several other major highways form the primary transportation network across the southern part of northwestern Ontario and there are particular challenges associated with this network. For example, construction and maintenance of these highways is relatively expensive due to the long distances, sparse population, harsh climate and difficult terrain found in this region.

As well, there are challenges associated with road closures as result of accidents or adverse weather conditions that can isolate residents, particularly when a community has only one access road.

Beyond serving as vital transportation links, highways also make a first impression on visitors to Ontario. As such, the availability and quality of services – such as rest stops and the use of welcoming signage – is important for creating a positive first impression of northwestern Ontario.

Relevance to Smart Growth

The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel believes that access to reliable, safe and affordable transportation links is essential to create opportunities for economic and community development, and for establishing and maintaining a high quality of life.

Advice to Government

7.1 **The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel recommends that the Ontario government develop a long-term strategic plan to improve and upgrade the Trans-Canada and other major regional highways in the northwest. This strategy should focus on both the east-west Trans-Canada highways, and the major north-south highways and border crossings that connect northwestern Ontario with the United States.**

7.2 **The panel further recommends that the province should actively solicit the federal government, and seek to gain federal funding for these highway improvements under the strategic highways infrastructure program and other federal infrastructure capital funding programs such as the Canada strategic infrastructure fund.**

7.3 **With respect to the Trans-Canada highways, the panel recommends that the following sections be four-laned: the stretch east of Thunder Bay where highways 11 and 17 run concurrently (including the**

single bridge at Nipigon); the stretch west of Thunder Bay where highways 11, 17 and 102 split (Shabaqua), where another single bridge exists; and highway 17 between Kenora and the Manitoba border. For the balance of the Trans-Canada highway, the panel recommends that the length and frequency of passing lanes be increased where necessary and that a fully paved shoulder be provided.

7.4 For the north-south highways, the priority should be on raising the standard of these roads to include better shoulders, the installation of rumble strips on paved shoulders, and increasing the weight-bearing capacity to handle large trucks. Priorities are highway 71 between Kenora and Fort Frances, highway 502 between Dryden and Fort Frances, and highway 622 between Ignace and Atikokan. Another benefit of improving these north-south highways is better access for American tourists to the far North via the all-weather road network (see "Expansion of the All-Weather Road Network").

7.5 The panel also recommends that highway signage be more welcoming and the number of informtative signs be increased. One opportunity for co-operation in this regard is the ongoing Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative, which intends to create a series of attractive signs to promote sites of natural heritage along the Lake Superior shore.

7.6 The panel also strongly recommends that the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) work with other key stakeholders to re-establish a network of attractive and convenient rest stops across northern Ontario. These rest stops would encourage motorists passing through to slow down and enjoy the sights, and improve highway safety by reducing the number of fatigued drivers on the highway.

7.7 Finally, the panel recommends that the government develop better connections to parks, lookouts, cultural displays, trailheads and other natural attributes. The Great Lakes Heritage Coast initiative provides a potential opportunity to create these linkages.

Photo credit: Donald H. Davies and Diana Astrid Fernandes

Beneficiaries

This plan would benefit every community in northwestern Ontario. It would be of particular interest to the tourism industry – investments in transportation infrastructure play a critical role in promoting tourism by facilitating access to the zone's many attractions.

The panel believes that in a largely undeveloped region like northwestern Ontario, high-quality highway access is critical to creating economic opportunity. Decisions to improve the caliber of the highways should not be made on the basis of traffic volume alone.

Cost Implications

The Ministry of Transportation has cost estimates for four-laning the Trans-Canada highway between Thunder Bay and Nipigon, the stretch west of Thunder Bay where highways 11, 17 and 102 split and the stretch from Kenora to Manitoba.

Estimates to improve the north-south highways vary significantly, depending on the scope and degree of upgrading undertaken. The panel believes that the federal government should contribute to the improvement of the Trans-Canada highways – as they do in other provinces.

Highway expansion or upgrading would require an additional capital allocation. There will also be an ongoing maintenance issue to address.

The cost of improved signage would be minimal but would be very visible and well received, and the cost of re-establishing rest stops will vary depending on the number of sites involved.

Action Item 8

Improved Connectivity

Background

In the 21st century, access to high-speed Internet connections will be considered a basic requirement for providing social, education and health services, for participating in the digital economy, and for a community to be economically competitive and capable of sustaining a culture of innovation. The Internet holds the promise to minimize the barriers posed by distance, and northwestern Ontario stands to benefit greatly from this opportunity. As such, provision of broadband is being viewed as part of the essential community infrastructure.

In most areas of the North, access to the Internet is available at slower speeds through dial-up services. However, the real potential of the Internet can only be realized through high-speed connections that allow for the provision of public services, such as distance learning and health care, and for electronic commerce – by creating the opportunity to connect with potential customers, suppliers and industry associations.

In many communities in northwestern Ontario, regionally based networks have already been developed as a grassroots response to the need for affordable access to the Internet. However, the need for continuous improvement of community networks in order to meet speed and bandwidth demands of providers and consumers of Internet services poses ongoing challenges for how to deliver these improvements. Distance and low population density have also contributed to the challenge of the private sector meeting this need on its own.

The Ontario government has been actively involved in recent years in expanding broadband in rural and northern areas where there are connectivity gaps. These gaps have been addressed through public-private partnerships and other community-based solutions.

The province has also established standards for the provision of broadband connection to provincial government offices and core public sector institutions. Many communities have responded by developing business plans, but often have not been successful in working with the federal and provincial governments to obtain the funding necessary for implementation.

Relevance to Smart Growth

The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel believes that access to high-speed Internet must be widely available in order for communities in the northwest to be on a level playing field with communities in southern Ontario – both in terms of having access to important public services and for having real economic opportunity.

The Smart Growth initiative provides an ideal forum for bringing together government, industry and community leaders to work together on a shared vision for connectivity in northwestern Ontario. Improving connectivity will require significant co-ordination and partnerships at the community level. Smart Growth relies on communities working together to make it happen.

Advice to Government

8.1 The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel recommends that the Ontario government continue to play a leadership role in bringing key players together to promote affordable broadband connectivity that allows the northwest, including aboriginal communities, to overcome the challenges of distance. The panel recommends that broadband be widely available across northwestern Ontario within several years.

8.2 The panel further recommends that the province continue its support for co-ordinated community-based solutions, in partnership with the private sector and the federal government, where the provision of access is uneconomic for the private sector alone, and that program design must continue to allow for the emergence of unique, locally based solutions.

8.3 Contact North, northern Ontario's distance education and training network, should shift from a reliance on video conferencing to computer conferencing as part of the province's commitment to broadband.

8.4 The province should also undertake to support a significant community development and awareness campaign to form local partnerships and encourage the success of existing and potential locally based solutions that are capable of providing good-quality broadband access.

Beneficiaries

Continued provincial leadership in expanding connectivity will lead to widespread benefits in communities across northwestern Ontario.

Cost Implications

The ongoing costs of improving connectivity in northwestern Ontario will be significant, and a provincial commitment to broadband connectivity will require continual investment by the public and private sectors to establish and upgrade a broadband network.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of Public Consultations

The northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel conducted focus group discussions and consultations with the public in Thunder Bay on March 5, 2003 and in Kenora on March 6, 2003. The purpose of these sessions was to discuss the ideas and recommendations contained in the panel's draft Letter of Advice to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Comments and suggestions arising during the focus group discussions and public consultations were used as input into the panel's final report.

The panel's draft Letter of Advice was also informed by presentations received by the panel at their monthly meetings over the past year on a variety of subjects and issues from a diverse range of individuals, organizations and ministries.

The response to the draft Letter of Advice was overwhelmingly positive. Participants at the focus groups and public consultations agreed that the panel's Action Items correctly identified the priority issues for the northwestern region. The feedback received from participants focused on more effectively articulating these issues and improving the focus or scope of the panel's specific recommendations.

Participants were strongly supportive of the consultative and consensus-building approach of Smart Growth. In fact, several unpopular or unsuccessful policy development processes from the past were raised as examples of why the Smart Growth approach is needed, and is much preferred.

Participants also voiced concern that important policies and programs are frequently developed by decision-makers located in southern Ontario without a full appreciation of the implications of these decisions on northern Ontario. The notion that Smart Growth may be able to improve (in fact, already has improved) this situation was very warmly received by attendees.

In terms of specific recommendations, attendees in both Thunder Bay and Kenora strongly supported the recommendation for a "Grow Bonds North" initiative that would allow investors to contribute to a pool of investment capital dedicated to businesses in the region.

Another area of much discussion was the relationship between the traditional resource-based economy of the Northwest and the many lucrative opportunities afforded by an emerging knowledge-based global economy. Attendees demonstrated a keen understanding of the linkage between the two, and recognized that many of the opportunities in this knowledge-based economy would, in fact, be built on traditional industries. In this context, the new Trusjoist plant in Kenora was raised as an excellent example of a future-oriented, value-added and knowledge-based enterprise made possible by the availability of wood fibre in the region.

Many participants also noted that the ideas and recommendations being put forward through the Smart Growth initiative are inherently interrelated and will require co-ordinated response by government.

Participants also recognized the primary importance of the province demonstrating more leadership and becoming more directly involved with resolving aboriginal issues. It was said more than once that success with many of the other recommendations would not be possible without first addressing important aboriginal issues.

There was also much discussion of the need for many "champions" for Smart Growth in northwestern Ontario. Several participants noted that many champions – beyond the Minister of Northern Development and Mines – will be needed to ensure that these recommendations make their way successfully through the political decision-making process and into public policy. Participants recognized that community and industry groups in the northwest have key roles to play in moving the Smart Growth agenda forward.

Finally, it was suggested that the province signal its serious and long-term intentions for Smart Growth and maintain the current momentum of the initiative by quickly moving forward with a "signature" Smart Growth project or program.

Appendix 2: Inter-ministry Support for the Northwestern Panel

Smart Growth Inter-ministerial Committees

The Smart Growth Secretariat, the overall co-ordinating body for Smart Growth within the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, has been working closely with other branches of the MAH and with partner ministries to co-ordinate and integrate programs, policies and initiatives and to give support to th Smart Growth panels.

Smart Growth partner ministries include

- Ministry of Transportation
- Ministry of Finance (SuperBuild)
- Ministry of Northern Development and Mines
- Ministry of Natural Resources
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food
- Ministry of Tourism and Recreation
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation
- Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
- Ministry of the Environment.

Representatives from other ministries are also involved as needed.

The inter-ministerial structure that has been functioning over the last year to support Smart Growth and the work of the panels includes a corporate steering committee and five inter-ministerial zone committees (one to support each panel). A major role of the zone committees is to provide data, information, perspectives and advice in support of the panels.

Corporate Steering Committee

The corporate steering committee comprised of Directors from key Smart Growth ministries, co-ordinated strategic input into the work of the panels and the government's Smart Growth agenda. The Committee has provided a forum for two-way communication between the Smart Growth Secretariat and members' own ministries, on all aspects of the Smart Growth initiative.

The Inter-ministerial Northwestern Zone Committee

The Northwest Zone Committee has been a key resource for the northwestern Ontario Smart Growth panel, providing information, data and feedback to the panel throughout the process of developing its advice to the minister. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing MSO Northwestern Office representative, Ian Smith, co-chairs the committee along with Dave Laderoute, Manager, Northwest Region, Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. Representatives on the committee have also worked closely with the Smart Growth Secretariat to co-ordinate and integrate Smart Growth-related policies and programs.

Northwestern Zone Committee Representatives:

Dave Laderoute, manager, Northwest Region, Ministry of Northern Development and Mines

Larry Lambert, regional director, Northwestern Region, Ministry of Transportation

Elaine Lynch, manager, Northern Region, Ministry of Tourism and Recreation/Ministry of Culture

Ian Smith, regional director, Northwestern Municipal Services Office, Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing

Ron Waito, manager (acting), Northwest Regional Planning Unit, Ministry of Natural Resources

Frank Wilson, director, Thunder Bay Regional Office, Ministry of Natural Resources

Arlene Smith, district manager, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Appendix 3: Northwestern Ontario Zone Profile

POPULATION

Population Projections by Municipality (in thousands)

	1996	1999	2021	% Change 1999–2021
Kenora	67.4	68.0	77.7	14.3
Rainy River	24.0	23.7	24.3	2.5
Thunder Bay	162.9	159.3	160.0	0.4
NW Ont. Total	**254.3**	**251.0**	**262.0**	**4.4**

Total Projected Population Growth (1999-2021): 11,000

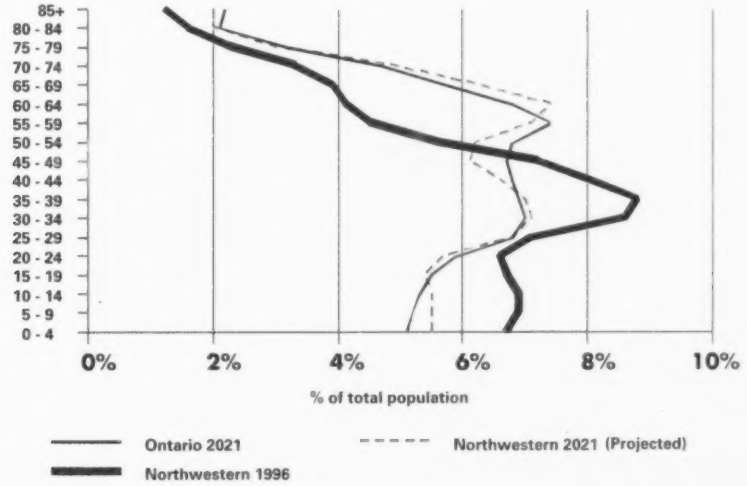
Number of Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA): 1 – Thunder Bay

Age Profile:

Age Groups	1996 (%)	2021 (%)
0-14	20.5	16.5
15-6	67.2	65.4
65+	12.3	18.1

Source: Ministry of Finance, 2000

Population: Age Distribution



Source: Ministry of Finance, 2000

2001 Census Population Update:

Population by District or Municipality (in thousands)

	1996	2001	Absolute Change 1996–2001	% Change 1996–2001
Kenora	63.4	61.8	- 1.6	- 2.5 %
Rainy River	23.1	22.1	- 1.0	- 4.4 %
Thunder Bay	157.6	150.9	- 6.7	- 4.3 %
NW Ont. Total	**244.1**	**234.8**	**- 9.3**	**- 3.8 %**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001

Note: 1996 Census Population figures in this table do not correspond to those found in the Population Projection Table on Page 37. This is due to what is commonly referred to as the Census Undercount. In some cases many individuals are not counted in the Census and this can include not receiving a Census questionnaire, not being included in a completed questionnaire, or the individual did not have a usual place of residence on Census Day. In 1996, the Census undercount was on average 2.6%. Census information found in the above table does not include this, while the Ministry of Finance Projections (found on page 37) takes the undercount into consideration.

Household Income (1996):

Mean:	$50,500	($54,300 in Ont.)
Median (by municipality, $):		($45,200 in Ont.)
Kenora	43,000	
Rainy River	39,800	
Thunder Bay	45,700	

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996

Dwelling Types (1996):

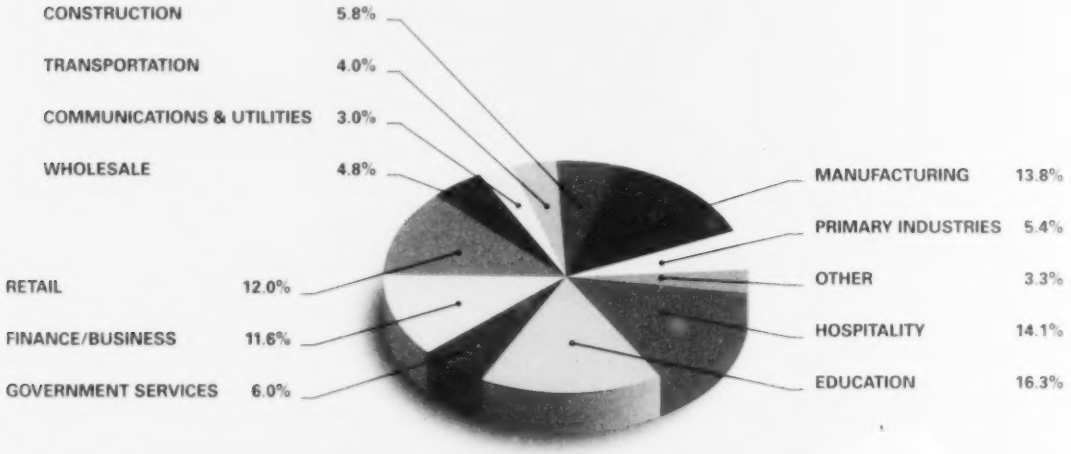
Detached House:	74.2%
Semi-detached House:	3.3%
Row House:	2.2%
Apartment Duplex:	3.2%
Apartment (less than 5 storeys):	11.1%
Apartment (more or equal to 5 storeys):	3.1%
Other	2.9%
TOTAL DWELLING UNITS:	**90,635**

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996

EMPLOYMENT

1996 Labour Force:	122,930	
1996 Participation Rate:	65.4%	(66.3% in Ont.)
1996 Employment/Population Ratio:		
Kenora	57.7	
Rainy River	57.6	
Thunder Bay	58.1	
NW Ontario	58.0	
Ontario	60.2	

(Number of jobs available in a district per 100 residential population)



Labour Force by Industry, 1996 total labour force within study area: 122,930

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996

TRANSPORTATION

Commercial Traffic by Truck (daily)

	Into NW Ontario:	Departs From NW Ontario:
Number of Trips:	1,560	1,450
Value of goods:	$25 million	$20 million

(MTO, Commercial Vehicle Survey, 1995, adjusted to 2000 estimates. Totals reflect only vehicles traveling the provincial highway system and does not capture all commercial traffic.)

Number of Motor Vehicles Registered (1998): 195,748 (Statistics Canada)
Airports with NAV Canada Towers: 1 – Thunder Bay International
International Border Crossings (vehicular): 3 – Fort Frances, Pigeon River, Rainy River

ENVIRONMENT

Number of Conservation Authorities: 1

Lakehead

Source: Conservation Ontario; number of Authorities fully or partially within Zone

Number Provincial Parks & Conservation Areas: 27

Source: Ministry of Tourism 1996

COMMUNITY

Number of Hospitals:	14
Beds Staffed and in Operation:	1,389

Source: Ontario Hospital Association, June 2001

Educational Facilities:

Colleges:	1 (Confederation)
Universities:	1 (Lakehead)

Source: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

AGRICULTURE

Year	# Farms	Gross Farm Receipts $	Area of Census Farm (Acres)
1986	791	35.6 million	306,683
1991	747	44.7 million	288,539
1996	753	46.1 million	282,601
86-96 Chg	-38	+10.5 million	-24,082
86-96% Chg	-4.8%	+29.3%	-7.9%

Source: OMAFRA, Statistics Canada

Appendix 4: Northwestern Zone Panel Members

Glenn Witherspoon (panel chairman)
Mayor, Fort Frances

Glenn Witherspoon has been the Mayor of Fort Frances for the past 11 years. He was first elected to council in 1985, where he served two terms as councilor.

Mayor Witherspoon has been the president of the Rainy River Municipal Association three times. He is a past-president of the Northern Ontario Municipal Association, and a former executive member of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's northern caucus.

Mayor Witherspoon served as the first chair of the newly formed District Social Services Administration Board in the Rainy River District, and served as a Northern Ontario representative on the transfer of services between the province and the municipal sector in 1996.

Ken Boshcoff
Mayor, Thunder Bay

Ken Boshcoff has been the Mayor of Thunder Bay since 1997. He was elected to council in 1978 as a ward alderman, and served for several years as an alderman at large.

Mayor Boshcoff is the Past-President of the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association and the Ontario Good Roads Association, and a member of the board for the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. He has served as Director for many organizations including the Royal Canadian Mint, in addition to a variety of community, charitable, and environmental groups.

He worked as a district planner for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, as Vice-President for Reed Stenhouse Insurance, as Director of Marketing for the Thunder Bay Port Authority, as a Lecturer for Lakehead University and as Vice-President for Boshcoff & Associates Insurance.

Mayor Boshcoff has an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in political science and economics from Lakehead University and a Master's degree in Environmental Studies from York University.

Donald S. Bubar
President and CEO, Avalon Ventures Ltd.

Since 1995, Donald Bubar has been president and CEO of Avalon Ventures Ltd., a Canadian junior mineral exploration and development company headquartered in Toronto, with an exploration office in Thunder Bay. Avalon explores mainly for rare and precious metals in northwestern Ontario and southern Manitoba, and is currently developing the "Big Whopper" lithium-tantalum deposit at Separation Rapids near Kenora, Ontario.

Mr. Bubar previously worked as exploration manager, then as vice-president of exploration, for Aur Resources Inc., from 1984 to 1994. He was involved in the Louvicourt copper-zinc-silver-gold discovery of 1989, near Val d'Or, Quebec.

Mr. Bubar is an exploration geologist with a Bachelor of Science degree from McGill University (1977) and a Master of Science degree from Queen's University (1981).

David Canfield
Mayor, City of Kenora

David Canfield is the mayor of the City of Kenora. During the 1980s, he was active in the organized labour movement and was president of the Kenora-Keewatin and District Labour Council from 1988-1992. He was also a part of the International Labour Council (encompassing the American Midwest and Canada) and served as president in 1994.

Mayor Canfield was elected as a councilor for the Town of Jaffray Melick in 1991, and was elected mayor in 1994. When Kenora, Keewatin and Jaffray Melick amalgamated to become the City of Kenora in 2000, he was elected mayor for the new city.

Mayor Canfield was elected to the Association of Ontario Municipalities (AMO) executive in 1997. He was elected president of the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA) in 1998, and was also elected as vice-president of AMO, representing Northern Ontario, that same year. Mayor Canfield now serves on various standing committees of AMO and NOMA.

Lorne Crawford
President, Northwestern Strategies Inc.

Lorne Crawford is owner and president of Northwestern Strategies Inc., a forestry consulting company. Prior to starting his own company, he was regional vice-president of Woodlands Northwest, Avenor Inc. and has also worked for Northwood Pulp and Paper in British Columbia.

Mr. Crawford has served on various industry and government committees related to stumpage, lumber and other issues over the past 25 years. He is past-president and a founding member of the Northwestern Ontario Log Transportation Association, a past member of the Forest Industry Action Group, and past chair of the Woodlands Board of the Ontario Forest Industries Association.

Mr. Crawford is a member of the Ministry of Natural Resources Minister's Forest Policy Advisory Committee, the Ontario Living Legacy Trust Fund, the Forest Capital 2000 board of directors, and the Ontario Native Secretariat Advisory Committee.

Mr. Crawford has a bachelor of science degree in forest engineering from the University of New Brunswick.

Sandy Dickson
Provincial chair, Ontario Fish and Wildlife Advisory Board

Sandy Dickson, provincial chairperson of the Ontario Fish and Wildlife Advisory Board, has been involved in the tourism industry for 29 years. She is co-owner/manager of Canoe Canada Outfitters and co-owner and president of Atikokan Aero Services Inc.

Ms. Dickson has served as the president of the Atikokan Chamber of Commerce. She has received the Northern Ontario Tourism Outfitters Association's Tourist Outfitter of the Year Award, and the Outstanding Woman in Tourism Award. In 2001, the Ministry of Tourism recognized her with the Bob Giles Award, for outstanding contributions to the tourism industry.

Cliff Friesen
Executive Vice President, Bearskin Airlines

Cliff Friesen, the executive vice-president of Bearskin Airlines, has been involved in the tourism sector for a number of years. He is president of a number of companies including Thunder Bay Air Park and Happy Time Tours and Travel.

Mr. Friesen also sits on the board of directors for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. He was past director of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, past board director of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and past director of the Ontario Tourism Council.

Patricia Lang
President, Confederation College

Patricia Lang has been president of Confederation College located in Thunder Bay, Ontario since July, 2000. Ms. Lang has worked in a number of management positions at Georgian College in Barrie over the past 15 years.

She has acquired extensive post-secondary experience in Quebec and Ontario, including previous teaching positions with Northern College in Timmins and Cambrian College in Sudbury.

A strong advocate of lifelong learning, Ms. Lang holds a master's of arts degree from Central Michigan University and a bachelor of nursing degree from the University of New Brunswick.

Mary L. MacKenzie
Clerk/Director of Corporate and Planning Services Municipality of Sioux Lookout

Mary MacKenzie is Clerk and Director of Corporate and Planning Services for the Municipality of Sioux Lookout. She has been with the municipality for 20 years, and has served 11 of them as clerk. She is on the Board of Directors of the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, and is currently a member of its Management Committee.

Michael McGuire
President, Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association

Michael McGuire is the president of the Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association. Mr. McGuire has been a community leader since 1966 and a founding member of the Métis movement in Ontario.

Mr. McGuire played an integral part in the development of solid relationships and partnerships between Aboriginal groups and the government, private investors, individuals, and Métis communities.

Since 1995, Mr. McGuire has been a governor and a member of the board of directors on the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP). He was also a founding member of CAP's predecessor, the Native Council of Canada.

Mr. McGuire has worked to develop various housing developments, training, education, and business support initiatives to assist Métis businesses across Ontario. Most recently, he was successful in revitalizing the Woodland Métis Tribe.

Pat Richardson (Mrs.)
Mayor, Marathon

Pat Richardson is Mayor of the Town of Marathon. Mayor Richardson is also a member of the board of directors of the Wilson Memorial General Hospital and serves as chair of the Marathon Police Services Board.

Mayor Richardson served as a school trustee for 16 years and she was chairperson of the Lake Superior School Board for eight years.

Mike Shusterman
President, The Land of the Nipigon Chamber of Commerce

Mike Shusterman is president of the Land of the Nipigon Chamber of Commerce. For the past three years, Mr. Shusterman has been general manager of Weyerhaeuser Nipigon Plywood Division. He also worked for Weldwood of Canada and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Mr. Shusterman is president-elect of the Northwestern Ontario Associated Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Land of the Nipigon Economic Development Committee.

He has also served as a member of the Sturgeon Falls Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Committee, as treasurer of the Temagami Forest Products Association, and as a member of the Forestry Advisory Committee of Algonquin College.

Harold Wilson
Executive director, Northwestern Ontario Development Network

Harold Wilson was born and raised in Thunder Bay. Since graduating from Queen's University in 1985 with a bachelor of commerce degree, he has worked in both Northwestern and Northeastern Ontario in economic development, primarily small business and trade development.

Since 1998, Mr. Wilson has been the Executive Director for the Northwestern Ontario Development Network, an organization representing economic development offices and Community Futures organizations and other partners across the Midwest. He works with the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association and the Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce on projects to enhance the economy of the region, including organizing last November's Great Rendezvous Conference.

Mr. Wilson was Chair of the Board of the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce for 1998-99 and remains on its Board. Since 2000, Mr. Wilson has been a director of the Thunder Bay Regional Hospital, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund and the Economic Development Council of Ontario.

Sidney Wintle
Mayor, City of Dryden

Sidney Wintle was elected mayor of the City of Dryden in 2000. He was first elected to Dryden council in 1998 where he served three terms as a councilor.

Mayor Wintle is a member of the Dryden Economic Development Advisory Committee, the Kenora District Services Board, the Police Services Board, and a former trustee for the Dryden District Board of Education. As mayor, Mr. Wintle sits on various other boards as well.

Mayor Wintle is a certified management accountant and has worked as an accountant and manager for a major Dryden employer in the mill, woodlands and data processing field.

Harvey Yesno
President and CEO, Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund

Harvey Yesno is president and CEO of Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund, a position he has held since 1993. Prior to this, he served as chief of Eabametoong First Nation for five terms and as councillor for one term. For the past twenty years, Mr. Yesno has been an active participant in national, regional and local organizations such as the National Indian Brotherhood, Assembly of First Nations and Nishnawbe Aski Nation. He founded Mid Can Air in the late '80s and operated the air service for seven years.

He is president of Neegani Investment Management Inc., vice-president of Northwestern Ontario Development Network, director of Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Investments Ltd., secretary of Wawatay Native Communications Society and director of Ontario First Nations General Partner Inc.

Mr. Yesno received a diploma in avionics maintenance technology from Confederation College in 1977. He is now a resident of Thunder Bay, but has lived in his home community of Eabametoong First Nation for most of his life.

Chair Glenn Witherspoon
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